

Part IV

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# Neither Conciliation Nor Toughness Is the Answer to Terror

By Charles William Maynes

WASHINGTON

**T**here are two schools of thought for handling the terrorism threat emanating from Lebanon, including the hijacking crisis. Both are wrong. Neither being conciliatory nor being tough will work. Being realistic about the nature of Lebanon may.

Being conciliatory toward terrorists runs the risk of encouraging similar outrages against innocent Americans in the future. Almost no one supports conciliation.

The United States has already been tough in Lebanon. It ordered the battleship New Jersey to fire into the hills of Lebanon in an effort to shore up the authority of the Christian-dominated central government. At the time, in response to concern about innocent victims, U.S. officials claimed knowingly that to fire the New Jersey's guns was "like tossing a Volkswagen on a tennis court."

Then in early June, 1985, the U.S. Navy quietly announced that it was undertaking an extensive program to improve the accuracy of its recommissioned World War II battleships. It turned out that because the United States was using powder dating from the Korean War, shells from the New Jersey—each heavy as a Volkswagen—tended not only to hit intended targets but Lebanese villages.

The result was to drive the Muslim majority of the country to the conclusion that the United States was the enemy. In the crazed atmosphere of Lebanese politics, the car bombing of the U.S. Embassy and the Marine barracks followed.

The legacy of hatred lives on. One of the hostages released in Algiers expressed confusion on her return to the United States: Why did the hijackers have such a hostile attitude toward New Jersey, the state she was from?

Nor was the firing of the New Jersey's guns the only misplaced effort to use force to solve a Lebanon problem that has no short-run solution. In May, 1985, American newspapers reported that the Reagan Administration had authorized the CIA to train counterterrorist units composed of foreigners, including Lebanese who could strike suspected terrorists before they could attack U.S. targets, and that one unit in Lebanon, acting without authority, planted a car bomb that killed more than 80 civilians instead of the Shia leader the team had hoped to assassinate.

The hijackers of TWA flight 847 also cite this attack as a justification for their action. In response, the CIA, in a carefully

worded statement, now points out that a House Intelligence Committee review of the incident found no CIA complicity in the bombing. But, of course, there can be no complicity in a runaway mission. There could be some residual responsibility.

The whole episode reveals why Secretary of State George P. Shultz's calls for preemptive U.S. action against terrorism—even at the risk of killing innocent civilians—are so misguided. After the runaway mission involving the car bombing, the United States rejected just such a policy, but no one in the rest of the world can be sure that this is the case. From now on, whenever assassinations occur in the Middle East, as they will, some parties may point to statements like those of Shultz as proof that the United States was behind the violent deed.

A senior official of Amal, the more moderate branch of Lebanon's Shia community, made this point when he commented that his chief, Nabih Berri, had lots of enemies in Lebanon but that after some U.S. statements, if anything happened to him, "all the Shias in the world will say the Americans are behind that, and no Americans in the Arab world will be safe after that." Some believe that better intelligence can resolve some of these dilemmas. But experienced American diplomats repeatedly warned the Reagan Administration against many of the actions that turned out to have such disastrous consequences. Some sections of Israeli intelligence are reported to have had grave reservations about the Ariel Sharon-Menachem Begin plan to prop up a Christian minority government in Lebanon, but the Israeli Cabinet ignored such warnings and plunged into the morass.

This latest incident is certain to reopen the question of whether the congressional investigations of CIA abuses in the past have gutted the American intelligence effort. The United States has made grave mistakes. It allowed the Shah of Iran to order the State Department and the CIA not to maintain contact with the Iranian opposition. And the United States has overestimated the intelligence achievements of Israel, which, like America, has suffered severe setbacks from terrorists in Lebanon.

The Reagan Administration has spared no effort to strengthen the CIA. But it will take years of effort to penetrate such groups as the Lebanese Shias, more moved by religious visions than by CIA promises of a Swiss bank account. Many Western intelligence agencies had penetrated the leadership structure of the

PLO, whose departure from Beirut ironically deprived Western governments of needed information, at least temporarily. But few have reliable agents among the new social groups that have thrust their way to the surface in the Middle East.

Some in the United States, these problems notwithstanding, want to resume a policy of toughness. Some have wanted to bomb Iran, presumably as the base of Shia fervor. Others have proposed that the United States arrange to have a disproportionate number of Lebanese Shias shot, presumably from among any of the "detainees" still held in Israel. As in the Carter Administration during the Iranian hostage crisis, these suggestions are advanced not because they will help resolve the crisis but because some officials are trying to protect the President's domestic base of support.

It is time to be honest about this crisis. Israel's holding of about 700 Lebanese Shias has been illegal, using these people as hostages. The United States has always believed that Israel was wrong to invade Lebanon, wrong to seize the hostages and wrong to transfer them to Israel.

Israel claims that the fate of the Shias has not been connected in any way to the fate of the American hostages and that it intended in any event to release them. So be it. Israel should have released these people without comment or conditions as part of the effort to extract itself completely from its disastrous involvement in Lebanon.

The United States should have made no comment on Israel's action. (The fact that the United States now has no ambassador in Israel makes it even more difficult to manage this sensitive issue.) It should also have refused to talk to those holding the U.S. hostages. No hint must be given, now or in any future hostage situations, that the United States will pay any price for release. The Administration should

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indicate that the future U.S. attitude toward Lebanon as a whole cannot be cooperative if the American hostage situation is not immediately resolved.

At some point in such incidents, third parties offer to intervene. In this instance, it is Syria, willing to hold, in Damascus, the American hostages until the Israelis complete the release of their Lebanese prisoners. The TWA passengers will be safer in Syria than in Lebanon. So a move to Syria is desirable. Nevertheless, the United States should not be party to negotiations with Syria over arrangements for a swap with Israel. There are three reasons:

First, since Israel insists the two issues are not linked, the United States should not itself link them by negotiating with the Syrians.

Second, a standing government like that in Syria should not act as a policeman for people seized illegally. It should understand that its obligation is the immediate release of the Americans.

Third, governments should not be encouraged to believe they can pursue legitimate national goals through illegitimate means. Such prominent Israelis as Abba Eban have been pointing out that Syria, ironically, has proven a country on which Israel has been able to rely to respect an agreement, provided its terms can be worked out. The quiet border on the Golan Heights proves that thesis to be true. Yet there are few leaders in the Middle East more ruthless than Hafez Assad, the Syrian president. The United States does not want to encourage the authorities in Damascus to conclude that seizing Americans is a convenient way of forcing Washington to put pressure on Israel to accept Syrian demands.

The United States should also draw some lessons for the immediate future regarding the U.S. presence in Lebanon. The country is like a sick patient who has received whatever help modern medicine can provide but who remains ill and a danger to others through contagion. In such cases a quarantine is imposed until the danger to others passes.

In the short run, it makes no sense for the United States to expose its citizens in Lebanon to unnecessary danger when conditions make it almost impossible for them to carry on their professional

duties. The U.S. government should order all American officials home and urge those holding U.S. passports to leave Lebanon until security conditions improve. This step should be taken even if there is a sudden resolution of the current crisis; for even before the recent hijacking, eight U.S. citizens in Lebanon were kidnapped.

In the long run, once the fever has passed, there will again be a major U.S. role in Lebanon. For Lebanon is a country of traders and bankers who can only survive with commercial energies turned outward. Once the internal struggle for power is settled, the new authorities will have a vested interest in restoring normal relations with the United States.

A wise captain does not sail his vessel directly into a tidal wave. He waits for a calmer sea.

Israel's misadventure in Lebanon has created a human tidal wave, raised even higher by subsequent U.S. mistakes. The wave must subside before there can again be a responsible outside role in Lebanon.

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*Charles William Maynes is the editor of Foreign Policy magazine.*